

News Release

Poinsettias are in Bloom at U of M Crookston Greenhouses; Horticulture students prepare for the holidays early in the semester

By Itollefs on Friday, December 6, 2013 Hundreds of rooted poinsettia cuttings arrive in August at the University of Minnesota Crookston in anticipation of another holiday season. Under the skill and coaxing of students involved in the commercial floriculture class, those cuttings develop into a beautiful poinsettia crop.

This year's poinsettias create a beautiful and colorful display with their showy "flowers" known as bracts and include varieties such as Candlelight White, Christmas Beauty Nostalgia, Christmas Feelings Red, Christmas Feelings White, Cinnamon Star, Classic Red, Enduring Marble, Enduring Pink, Prestige Red, Cortez Early Red, Dramatic Red and Prestige Red.

Members of the fall semester class include: Amanda Thompson, a senior majoring in horticulture from Pine River, Minn.; Ashley Radke, a junior majoring in horticulture from Grand Forks, ND; and Stephanie Reko, a junior majoring in horticulture from Andover, Minn.

In October, students started the process of forcing the plants to induce bract color in time for the holiday season in October. Following a specific procedure to control the light, the students covered the plants with a dark cloth at 4 p.m. and uncovered them at 8 a.m. each day to regulate the length of daylight the plants receive. The students are responsible for greenhouse chores on the weekends as well. Although the class is taught by Sue Jacobson, the crop is in the hands of the students. The work and production of the poinsettia crop is entirely the responsibility of the class. Jacobson says, "It's better to learn expensive lessons in school than at your job. We don't fire the students."

The Agriculture and Natural Resources Department offers commercial floriculture as part of the horticulture program to teach students to produce quality plants for a specific date - a skill necessary for employment in a greenhouse or garden center. "Poinsettias form their colored bracts, when the light is regulated," explains Jacobson. "The poinsettia really doesn't have a blossom like most flowers. Instead, the colorful red, pink, or white petals are modified leaves known as bracts. The blossoms are actually the small yellowish clusters in the center."

Jacobson often allows problems to develop to see how the students will solve them--something they would have to do in an employment situation and giving them an opportunity to apply what they have learned. The class demands hard work, dedication, and a strong team effort to grow the best poinsettias. Leadership and responsibility are two of the qualities that develop in this type of teaching and learning environment.

"Students learn so much from applying their classroom learning to real-world experience," Jacobson explains. "By taking responsibility for the crop, the students are accountable for the outcome making the commercial floriculture class one of the most memorable for the students." The class is excellent training for a career in horticulture, a multi-billion dollar industry in the U.S.

To learn more about the horticulture program with emphases in environmental landscaping and production horticulture, visit www.UMCrookston.edu/academics.

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In the group photo, left to right, are Amanda Thompson, Ashley Radke, Stephanie Reko and Sue Jacobson, instructor.

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